

Political Science 020 – Controversial Legal Issues Fall 2011

James Brent
Clark Hall 471
924-5572
email: james.brent@sjsu.edu

Office Hours
Mondays 10:00 – 2:00
Tuesdays 1:30 – 3:00
1st & 3rd Wednesdays 12:00 – 3:00
Thursdays 11:00 to 12:00 and 1:30 to 3:00

This Course meets GE Area A3 – Critical Thinking

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- distinguish between reasoning (e.g., explanation, argument) and other types of discourse (e.g., description, assertion);
- identify, analyze, and evaluate different types of reasoning;
- find and state crucial unstated assumptions in reasoning;
- evaluate factual claims or statements used in reasoning and evaluate the sources of evidence for such claims;
- demonstrate an understanding of what constitutes plagiarism;
- evaluate information and its sources critically and incorporate selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system; and
- reflect on past successes, failures, and alternative strategies
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Textbooks:

Gerston, Larry. (2009). *Confronting Reality: Ten Issues Threatening to Implode American Society*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt

Browne, M. Neil, and Stewart Keeley. (2009). *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking*. (9th edition) New York: Prentice Hall.

Organization of the Course

This course is divided into 10 topics or “modules.” All modules last two weeks. All modules begin at 11:00 a.m. on a Monday and end at 11:00 a.m. on the Monday two weeks later. There will be many weeks when two modules are active at the same time. Each module has several common elements:

- Assigned Reading – there is reading assigned for every module
- Video Lectures – each module has video lectures that you will be responsible for
- Homework Assignment – There will be a homework assignment for each module
- On-Line Argument – There will be an on-line discussion/argument for each **even-numbered** module that you must participate in. [In other words, there are discussion topics for modules #2, #4, #6, #8, and #10.]

In addition, there will be a midterm, a final exam, and a research paper.

Grading: The breakdown of your grade is as follows:

Critical Thinking Exercises (9 assignments; 5 points each)	45 points
Final (Friday, December 16)	15 points
First Draft of Paper (due November 4)	10 points
Critique of Other Student's Paper (due Nov. 18)	5 points
Paper Final Draft (due December 2)	15 points
Participation in On-Line Debates	10 points

Critical Thinking Exercises – There will be a critical thinking exercise for each module -- activities designed to help you practice and utilize the skills learned during that module. Because there are 10 modules, there will be a total of 10 assignments during the semester. Students are only required to submit nine (9), meaning that they can miss one assignment without penalty. If a student submits more than nine assignments, I will give them credit for the nine assignments with the highest grades. Late assignments will not be accepted for ANY reason, including technical problems, but as stated above, you may skip one assignment without penalty.

Final Exam -- You will have a final examination which will consist exclusively of essay and short-answer questions and will be in open-book, open-note format. The final exam will be available for a 24-hour period beginning at 12:01 a.m. on the scheduled day of the exam (December 16). Once you begin the exam, you will have 2 hours to complete it.

Paper Assignments – These are explained more completely at the end of this syllabus.

On-Line Discussions/Arguments – There will be a discussion/argumentation topic for each even-numbered module (#2, #4, #6, #8 and #10), and you will be asked to participate. The discussion topics will be established by the course professor. In order to receive credit for an on-line discussion, you must do the following:

1. Make an initial post of at least 150 words – After you have viewed the assigned topic, you should post a response of at least 150 words to the class discussion board.
2. Wait at Least 24 Hours
3. Respond to someone else's post with at least 150 words – You must also respond to a post submitted by another student. This response must be at least 150 words in length. You must wait at least 24 hours after posting your original comment before posting your second comment in order to receive credit. You can earn up to 1 point per module for doing this.

University Academic Integrity Policy: “Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University, and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty are required to report all infractions to the Office of Judicial Affairs. The policy on academic integrity can be found at [\(include url here\)](#).”

University Statement on Disability: “If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with DRC to establish a record of their disability.”

Course Topics and Readings:

Module #1 – Introduction to Arguments; Parts of an Argument

Dates: August 24 – September 5

Assigned Reading: Browne & Keeley, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4; Gerston, Chapter 1

Module #2 – Terrorism

Dates: September 5 – September 19

Assigned Reading: Gerston, Chapter 11

Module #3 – Critical Thinking: Reasonableness

Dates: September 12 – September 26

Assigned Reading: Browne & Keeley, Chapters 5, 6 and 11

Module #4 – Global Warming

Dates: September 26 – October 10

Assigned Reading: Gerston, Chapter 9

Module #5 – Critical Thinking: The Role of Language and Assumptions

Dates: October 3 – October 17

Assigned Reading: Browne & Keeley, Chapters 5 and 6

Module #6 – Immigration

Dates: October 10 – October 24

Assigned Reading: Gerston, Chapter 10

Module #7 – Critical Thinking: Relevancy

Dates: October 17 – October 31

Assigned Reading: Browne & Keeley, Chapter 7

Module #8 – Education

Dates: October 31 – November 14

Assigned Reading: Gerston, Chapter 3

Module #9 – Critical Thinking: Sufficiency

Dates: November 14 – November 28

Assigned Reading: Browne & Keeley, Chapters 10, 12 and 13

Module #10 – Taxation

Dates: November 28 – December 12

Assigned Reading: Gerston, Chapter 2

PAPER ASSIGNMENT

Because this class is all about argumentation, it is very important that students learn how to construct arguments as well as criticize them. Therefore, all students are required to submit an argumentative research paper in two drafts, as well as critique a paper submitted by another student.

Step 1 – Select Your Issue (no due date)

You should select a controversy related to one of the five major legal themes of this course: immigration, global warming, terrorism, education or taxation. In doing so, you should select a specific proposal that has been made, because you will then be arguing about whether we should adopt that proposal or not. *You should clear your topic in advance with me before you begin researching or writing your paper.*

Step 2 – The First Draft (due November 4)

The first draft of your argument should be at least eight (8) double-spaced pages and should use a minimum of eight sources. Your argument should be reasonable, relevant and sufficient, and will be graded for how well it possesses these qualities.

You must submit a copy of your first draft in two different ways:

1. You must submit a copy of the paper using the “dropbox” in D2L.
2. You must post a copy of your paper to the “Discussion” board in D2L.

Step 3 – Critique of Your Own Paper (due November 4)

At the same time that you submit your first draft, you need to also submit a second document. In this second document, you should write a critique of your own first draft. In other words, you should tell me whether you’ve made a good argument or not, and you should tell me which parts of your argument are strong and which parts are weak. You should also assign a grade to yourself. This critique should be submitted via the “dropbox.” [You do NOT need to post a copy of this critique to the discussion board.]

Step 4 – Your Critique of Another Student’s Paper (due November 18)

You will then be assigned to critique the first draft of a paper written by another student using the “Discussion” feature of D2L. Your critique should include two elements. First, you should “diagram” the other student’s argument (i.e. you should identify the student’s conclusion, along with all premises and subpremises). Second, you should critique the argument using the concepts of reasonableness, relevance and sufficiency as developed in class. This critique is *public* and should be submitted as a “reply” to the other student’s paper in the “Discussion” board. [This is so the other student can read your comments.]

Step 5 – Your Final Draft (due Dec. 2)

Finally, you will submit a final draft of your paper. This final draft should be at least 10 pages long, and should be submitted via the D2L “dropbox.” In most cases, your final draft should be significantly different from your first draft, based on the feedback you receive from me and your fellow student. I am not looking for merely cosmetic changes, but rather a fundamental attempt to strengthen the argument made in your first draft. Merely adding a sentence or a paragraph here or there will not be sufficient in most cases.

Step 6 – Explain Your Changes (due Dec. 2)

Finally, you must submit a second paper in which you explain the changes that you made from your first draft, and an explanation for those changes. This should be submitted via the “dropbox.”

How the Papers Will Be Graded

- Spelling and Grammar – University graduates should be able to communicate in the English language and, in fact, the university requires that writing standards be enforced throughout the curriculum. Thus, points will be deducted for poor spelling and grammar.
- Attribution -- In addition, students must provide proper attribution for their sources. I don't care which citation style you choose to use, but you must use one.
- Quality & Number of Sources Used – the better (i.e. more credible) your sources, the better your argument and the higher your grade. The more relevant information you have, the better your argument and the higher your grade. Effort counts.
- Strength of Your Analysis/Argument – **This is an argumentative paper.** As a result, papers will be graded on the strength of the evidence and logic that they use to support their conclusion. In other words:
 - your argument should be logical
 - it should use reliable (reasonable) evidence that is relevant and sufficient to establish the conclusion. This evidence can only be obtained by doing research. Your sources should be reliable and unbiased.

NOTE: Late papers will be accepted, but penalized by one letter grade regardless of excuse. Papers are also automatically submitted to turnitin.com, a plagiarism-detection service.